

SAFETY AND CONSUMER PROTECTION

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to analyse the connexion between rationality and emotion in shaping purchasing behaviour and the way in which some external stimuli such as expert advice or advertising influence them. These external stimuli may be used to manipulate consumerism and purchasing behaviour against the legitimate interests of consumers.

The article requires a structured approach to researching consumer behaviour but also the quality of life. The aim is to draw attention to the rational behaviour of people often forced to choose between the quality of a product and the satisfying the immediate, individual need.

The motivational projectivity of the behaviour of the consumer's self carries a particular strength on the individual who lets him/herself involved in a challenging source whose outcome is the selective orientation towards the source of attraction, ensuring thus the guiding of behaviour in accordance with the irradiation of the source. Identifying the numerous variables that lead to the appearance of the idea of acquisition determines the change in the polarity centre which is made up of predispositions that are at the base of the product receptivity and thus the purchase suggestion. Loyalty for products creates certain tense conditions in a universe of uncertainty of choice consequently offering certain stability in time. Quality of products may trigger an increase in the individual health, as well as the society he/she belongs to. Health is life, and a life in which the choice of the best for individual and the enterprise he/she comes from leads to absolutisation, then one can say that they have accomplished the task of giving a chance to succeed to the generations to come.

Keywords: consumer satisfaction, product quality, consumer manipulation, food safety, consumerism

Classification JEL: D18, D63

Introduction

Within any economic activity there should be the wish of meeting the requirements but also anticipating the needs through systematic monitoring and designing appropriate investigative tool.

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Starting from the concept that we live only once and then to live healthy, I tried to put in value the importance of respect for consumers by creating healthy products. We also implemented the idea of purchasing their products, resulting in the need of personal and external influences. Human thinking should not be affected, consumers should relax and take in their own hands the reins decision resulting health and life lived but human fulfillment.

Consumer behaviour analysis of market phenomena requires in depth field studies of the economic behaviour of people, but studies in light of the anticipation and motivating phenomena seen as a result of the accumulation of life experience under the influence of mobility and plasticity of their needs.

The economic subject is behaviour towards individual needs or the mini-membership. Behaviour is directly determined by the suggestion process developed in conjunction with motivational research designed to explain the mechanism of consumerism and purchasing decisions.

Consumer dependency is given not only by the desire to purchase, but also by the need of human existence determined mainly by necessity.

Throughout the article I intended to create an interface between the consumers and received by the message but also develop a behavioral attitude with which to manipulate the collective mind.

1. Power purchase decision behavior

The phenomenon of product demand incubates the existence of clear-cut attitudes and therefore derives a relatively stable emotional state towards a 'product'.

Although in the beginning of the need to desire the emphasis was laid on motivation, as a result of human intellectual energy resources, gradually, they went to coverage of the cognitive components of human behaviour, representing more than a simple control mechanism (Cătoiu etTeodorescu, 1997).

We must take into account the so-called arrangements or dispositions to desire to acquire high quality products. The essential attitudinal factors may have a role in potentiating the provocative nature of the protection situation of the person buying or, on the contrary, in the dynamic or neutralizing its action force.

There should be an *expectation* action from the excitant (product): attitudes, reasons play the role of boosting the provocative nature of the situation. The product must meet the expectations and needs of the buyer.

'The guiding idea' is one of the fundamental characteristics of suggestibility. It must be formulated in precise terms and it must dominate the promotion campaign.

It really requires an analysis of the need for purchasing, which highlights the desire for better of each of us, desire that is born from the protection of the one who buys products globally but also individually.

A special place to explore the needs of buying good quality products is consumer protection and behaviour of self but whose goal is to investigate the areas of behavioural processes in fact inaccessible by conventional approaches. It explores the human psyche in such areas

which are closely related to the personality of subjects and direct approaches could be considered undesirable by them.

A more rapid change in attitudes towards a product occurs when there is a greater discrepancy between the original and the attitude that we want to implant. The discrepancy should not be so high as to cause lack of gullibility or negative attitude toward the communicator:

- Subjects that were asked to be more attentive to the content of communication could be more easily influenced because they have shifted attention from internal confirmation process of existing persons constructs;
- It must become passive on the interior in order to be easier to influence the subject.

The implied answer represents the final link of the suggestive approach, respectively the subject's reaction on the matter suggested. This answer is not always visible and controllable; the most suggestive influences remain hidden. (Burghelea, 2009).

People are being manipulated by various tactics to be part of the 'purchasing' phenomenon, they are injected with serum indifference when it comes to buying products. They do not take into account quality, but take care that other factors take priority over those that may affect health.

Appropriate behavioural phenomenon towards product quality is a provoked situation that shows a road to follow (any particular type of behaviour / buying a particular product), requiring the person to comply without appeal to the courts of critical reason.

Research mode of action of these variables is hampered by the fact that the human mental processes cannot be observed directly but can only be deducted from the postulation of hypothetical variables present in the mind of the self and from which it follows a particular behaviour. Sensory inputs are the leading motivational phenomenon perceptible only to a certain level of experience and we talk about that experience of taste pleasure and not the experience of quality and health of the person next to us, by using high quality products.

These issues must be considered when we speak of quality as well as consumer protection, which aims to differentiate the components for specific target consumer segments.

Buyer's decision process can be simulated and especially insinuated by testing possible reactions when confronted with various (promotional) messages, but also in terms of relations between buyer and environment.

People have different value systems that guide and develop differently propensity for some goods and especially for creating and perpetuating the need for consumption. Therefore, preferences will be different from one individual to another, as for the same individual under different space-time conditions. Basically, preference is manifested differently in relation to the total utility.

Preferences are also manifested depending on the level of maturity of the need to buy products of any kind, good or bad in terms of health and not quality, which develops differently from person to person. Some of us have a strong sense of immunization to purchase any kind of product, but others are not prone to overall immunization and consequently there occurs the purchase phenomenon located on different stages.

Meeting the diverse needs of goods available most often emphasizes and repeated quasi-saturated nature of consumer needs. However, there are some quasi-common elements for a particular social group related to the manner in which propensity for certain goods or services are structured.

They are generally under the emblematic sign of some traditions, habits, customs, depending on the specificity of a particular geographical area or complex psychosocial factors interfering with the degree of culture and civilization of a social group.

Customer satisfaction is in direct connection with the utility or futility of a product. The usefulness of a product has though a high subjective load, which affects consumers differently and fairly.

The diversity of consumer needs reflects the great diversity of human preferences and implicitly the variety of consumption patterns.

There is in any product a quantitative point which, once attained, maximizes customer satisfaction. Continued use after that quantitative segment will bring a gradual decrease in satisfaction, up to a limit level, equivalent to dissatisfaction.

The consumer is a universe of reasons that can not be observed directly, which makes their observation difficult. The others are generated by coexistence of consumer in society and have as objective the satisfaction of the former's psychological needs. Every person needs not only material goods to ensure survival, but also the aspiration to be considered or need not be disregarded, so that it can become a universal whole.

The underlying motives to purchasing behaviour and consumption but may be tangential to the idea of rationality and emotionality.

The rationality vector being associated with consumer's reason develops at a higher level the willingness to purchase low quality products which becomes functional, durable and not least economical. Emotionality is closely related to satisfying the psychological needs of individuals, which are dominant for new or luxury products.

Success of a product in a market and its sale for unlimited terms lies in fact in the success of indirect influence on consumer for its purchase.

Regardless of the approach taken, the consumer, seen as a beneficiary of the success can be seen only in economic and social context of consumer of goods and services, located in three-dimensional relations between perception, attitude, and motivation, outlining the integrity of the group which the individual is part of in the macro space made up of all consumer goods and existing services (Albu et Nedelea, 2006, p.131).

2. Quality of life experienced by consumer safety

In our society, where social structures have a high complexity, the consumer has a special status, dictated largely by income, health, education etc.

Studies to assess the survival rate demonstrated the compatibility of consumer in the conditions imposed by the European Union, showed the consumer standard of living, exemplified by level of poverty.

Consumer behaviour is motivated by a complexity of factors that directly or indirectly affect the process of purchasing and consumption, and the consumer situation in our country should be pursued not only in the economic context but also in the way of living.

If uncertainty interferes in the consumer's mind, then we can say that we reach the wake from the state of empathy, awakening that leads to the selection of products that are good not only to the body but also to the mind, so the consumer avoids the risk, relying not on a 'idea =taken over product' but on quality. Categories of risk may reveal uncertainty in human choice.

The fundamental risks that may endanger life, I believe that great importance is the risk of chemical, microbial, physically and biologically. (Figure no. 1)

Among the fundamental risks that can otherwise endanger life, a distinct category is represented by the chemical, microbial, physical and biological risks.

Some chemical substances that help human beings embellish life, such as cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, products that contribute to food safety have numerous benefits for the consumers, creating jobs and bringing into focus the idea of innovation. Yet, the same beneficial products also present risks for human health, as well as the environment. Toxic substances that can be accumulated in the human body and heavy metals that can be discharged in rivers, poisoning fish, are a real danger to the quality of life. The consumer is responsible for accessing the information on the products that he/she consumes in order to minimise the undesired risks. Thus, one can notice in the European Union a certain concern to guarantee a high safety threshold of human health and environment by evaluating the toxicity of chemical, biological and microbial compounds that must be used to protect human life and global health. Life expectancy of the human community is based primarily on removing the risk factors, from the physical to the environmental ones. Consumers should be protected from exposure to chemical, biological, etc. products that could damage health.

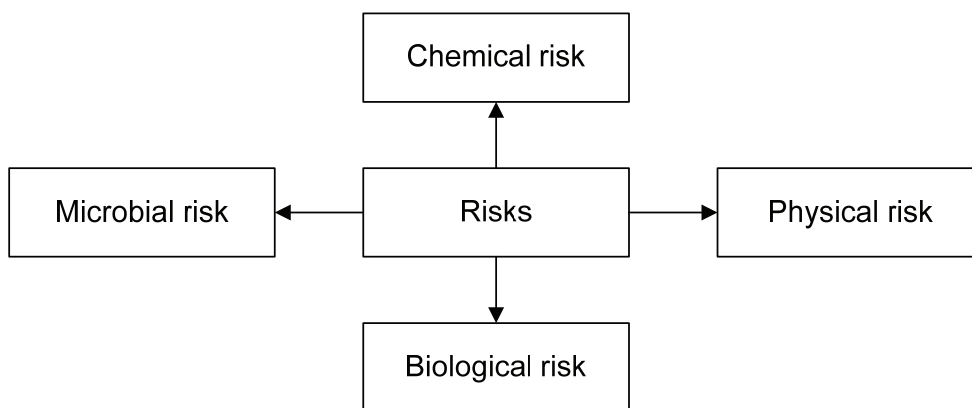


Figure no. 1: Types of risk of consumers

Source: proposal author

Consumers are the main source of quality assessment. They are in fact the test that products must pass in order to ensure their chance of a good sale. Satisfying the consumer requests of those who purchase goods is a constant challenge of merchants.

Consumers may choose products depending on their quality or non- quality, they can approach food safety from several angles. (Figure no. 2)

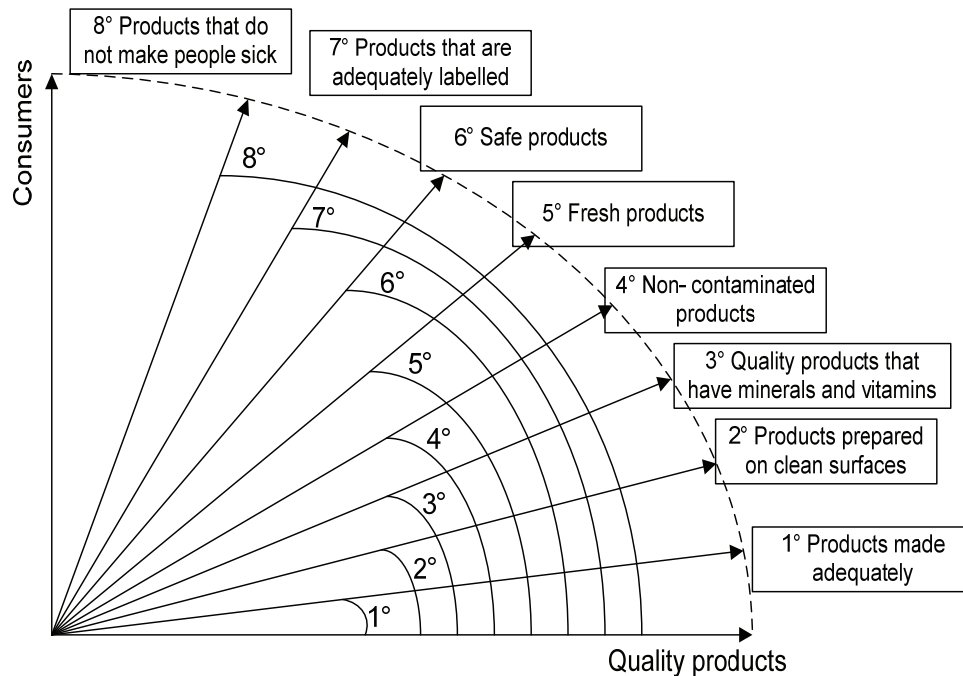


Figure no. 2: Consumers' requests concerning the products quality

Source: proposal author

Approaching the consumer from the perspective of the analysis of quality degrees concerning products that affect health, one can notice the fact that at the base of the scale there are products acquired appropriately, therefore representing the minimum of quality accepted by consumer. The maximum of this scale, that is products most wanted from the point of view of quality, is represented by products that do not make people ill.

In most cases consumers are faced with many situations in which the product has the label that looks all right, but in fact may contain misleading statements that can not be verified. Consequently, many products contain the message that they are good for the immune system, when in fact all that is intended is a larger sale of the product based on misleading information. The marketing teams come up with attractive labels that provide false information on the quality and beneficial effects of the product, and this information is actually strictly commercial and cannot be verified or approved by any organisation recognised and certified by the Ministry of Health. The same category of ambiguous information also includes the products with 'tested on animals' on their labels, as if the producer guarantees through this the viability of the product. Animal organism is different from the human one, and thus the product is not always good for human health. (Figure no. 3)

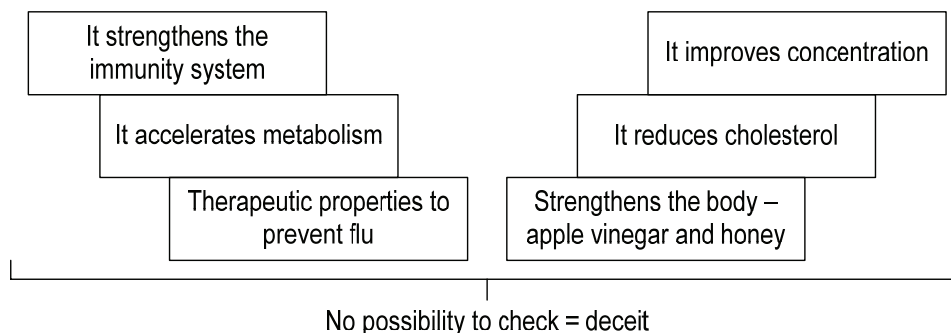


Figure no. 3: Products labelled with misleading information

Source: proposal author

Specialists in nutrition recommend food to consumers without the 'E' additives, but what we are offered on the market today makes it impossible to wish for more; everywhere you look there are food additives with varying degrees of risk. The most important ones with a high degree of risk are: preservatives and synthetic dyes and food additives which improve flavour: flavours for meat (E621, E634), additives used for bread (E210) but also used for colouring the product (E102 - yellow). Although Europe prohibits many additives (E231) characterized as poisons, Romania still tolerate more than 200 food additives. These substances are harmful, leading to tumours, headaches and other disorders of the immune system. Therefore we should be informed of the hazards present in live food (Gugiu, et al., 1993).

Nowadays, consumers have certain rights to calm fears of food safety, rights that are included in the Consumer Code that came into force in 2007 and which highlights the traders' obligations. Current legislation forbids deceiving advertising, consumer manipulation through false information, and attempts to align to a standard of quality of life that would make future generations proud of. By guaranteeing the use of safe products and services and a fair-play behaviour towards consumers can ensure merchants the status of quality leader, transmitting thus a healthy message of life. (Figure no. 4)

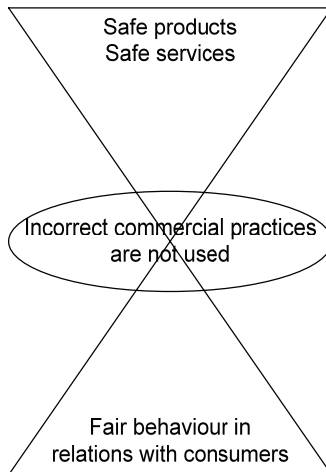


Figure no. 4: Traders' obligations

Source: proposal author

At country level, the European Union prohibits counterfeit products at all levels: import, manufacture, distribution and marketing. (Figure no. 5) The purpose is to protect the original products, well-known registered marks, thus guaranteeing a fundamental right of the consumer: QUALITY. There are on the market counterfeit products of some brands, particularly textiles, as well as products of an inferior quality of manufacturers with names similar to recognized brands.

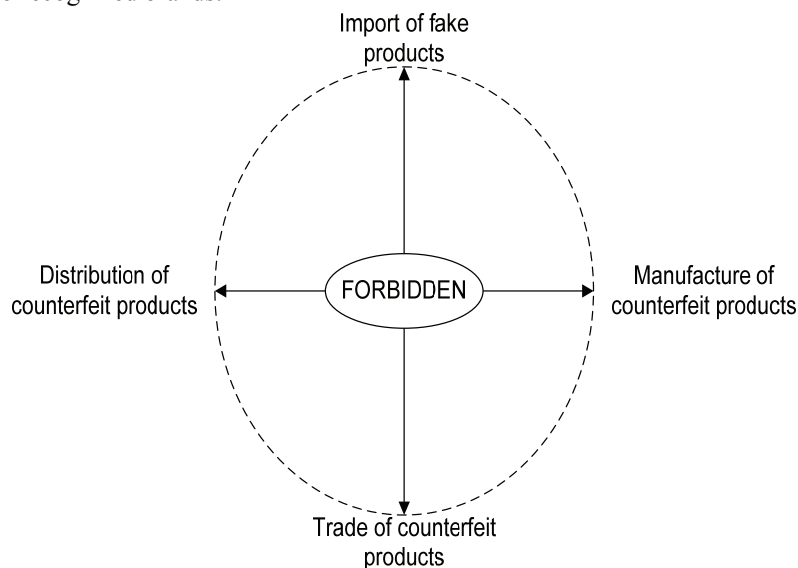


Figure no. 5: Forbidden activities

Source: proposal author

All of these are dangerous; they may affect the life, health and safety of consumers.

3. National and international directives that protect the consumer

In early 2008, Law 363 entered into force which stipulates new directives to combat unfair practices of traders in their relationship with consumers. They are grouped into 2 categories: deceptive practices and aggressive practices. (Figure no. 6) The misleading ones contain deceptive information that misleads consumers. Deceptive information may refer to:

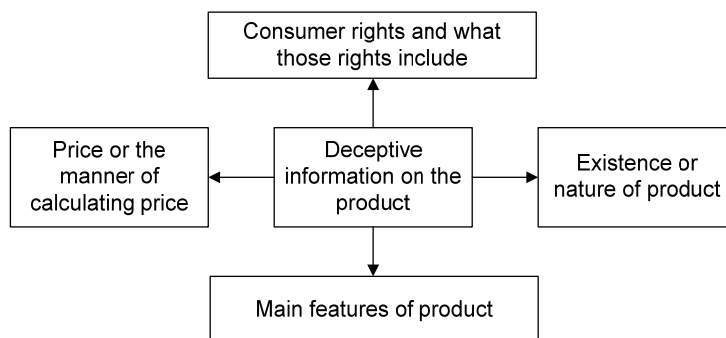


Figure no. 6: Deceitfulness of information

Source: proposal author

If the consumer is asked to buy, then the product must contain essential information in order to decide or not the purchase.

The information must relate to the main features of the product, identification of dealer, product price, payment arrangements and business presentations, including advertising, which are not insignificant. Aggressive practices limit and restrain the choice of a specific product by coercion, and thereby determine the consumer to take a transaction decision that otherwise he/she would not take it. (Figure no. 7)

The following factors can determine whether a commercial practice is aggressive or not:

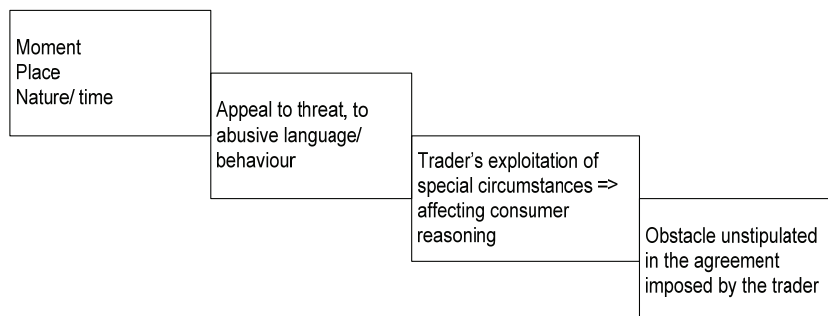


Figure no. 7: Characteristics of aggressive commercial practices

Source: proposal author

In 2009, it was issued the Order of National Authority for Consumer Protection No. 433/2009 on certain measures of consumer information published in the Official Gazette of Romania, Part I, no. 444, of June 29, 2009 which stipulates:

- in Article 1 paragraph 1: to better inform consumers and give them the opportunity to express their opinion about their products and services that are provided by operators, operators are required to display in visible areas of marketing or, where appropriate, service delivery, a notice with the telephone number TEL INFO - CONSUMER: 0800 080 999 - toll free phone line and addresses, telephone / fax and e - mail county commissariats for consumer protection, that of the Commissioner for Consumer Protection of the Municipality of Bucharest, or in whose territorial range the economic operator is. Moreover, the booklet will contain the address of the official website of the National Authority for Consumer Protection: www.anpc.gov.ro;

- Article 2. - The booklet referred to in Art. 1 will be achieved by the economic operator;

- Article 3. - Operators who manage e-commerce sites (electronic commerce) are required to submit on the first page of the website (home page) a link to the official web address of the National Authority for Consumer Protection: www.anpc.gov.com ;

- Article 4. - This Order shall enter into force within 30 days after publication in the Official Gazette of Romania, Part I.

- Article 5. -The entry into force of this Order is repealed by Order of the President of the National Authority for Consumer Protection no. 535/2001 on certain measures of

consumer information published in the Official Gazette of Romania, Part I, no. 4 of 7 January 2002.

Food safety is guided by the principles of national health. A healthy man can give society much more than a sick man. If citizens are not regarded as independent bodies who think and conceive a national development that is based on the health of the common living whole, then health of the entire planet is endangered.

The concept of health is also adopted at EU level where safety touches upon safety that serves protection and promotion of consumer health. Certain qualitative and safety indicators must be achieved in accordance with the priorities of European consumer: products must be safe and with a high threshold as to confer the protection of life.

European consumer policy reflects the needs and expectations of citizens. The EU legislation system governs the safety standards, security and health in order to boost consumer confidence.

European Union adopted in December 2006, a new consumer program for 2007-2013, with a total budget of 157 million Euros. It has two main guidelines:

- raising consumer safety through better information, through closer consultation and a better representation of consumer interests;
- effective enforcement of consumer protection rules, notably through cooperation in enforcing legislation, information, education and redress.

Some categories that are a risk to human health or safety may be totally banned on the EU market. Taking and using plasticisers called phthalates, which can be toxic if ingested by young children, has been banned in toys since the late 1990s. Since 2006, the European Commission banned the sale of disposable lighters that were not provided with a protection mechanism when they came to be used by children.

Each EU member country has a responsibility to ensure that products meet safety requirements. Otherwise, they may withdraw or may require their removal from stores, may issue warnings or take any other appropriate measures.

If in a country a dangerous product is found, the other countries of the European Community are notified about the product through a rapid alert system called 'RAPEX'. The system facilitates cooperation between national and European authorities to detect dangerous products and their rapid withdrawal from the market. For food there is a similar system called 'RASFF'.

The European Commission also works with third party countries to help them in their attempt to ensure compliance with European standards for products. For example, the agreement between China and EU to cooperate for safer products, especially for toys. A cooperation of this scale is profitable for both parties because it gives European consumers a greater range of quality products and helps countries to have access to the largest single market in the world.

When buying a new product, it should look and function exactly as it was advertised. But if there are still problems when the product reaches its destination after purchase we should know that each of us has some rights.

Most acquisitions and transactions in Europe are conducted without reasons of complaint. But nevertheless, if we have reason to complain, we should know that the following rights and responsibilities apply across the European Union:

- when the item bought does not look or does not work as advertised or if it is not satisfactory, we have the right to have it replaced or to have a refund if no replacement was done in time, without additional costs.
- when we buy goods that turn out to be damaged, manufacturers must compensate for any injury or damage.
- when buying goods or services by mail, phone, fax or Internet, from a professional trader, we have the same rights in respect of guarantees as when we buy them in a store.

Today, consumers receive more commercial offers than ever, by mail, telephone or Internet. All these methods of sale called 'distance marketing' may arise under the pretext of offering consumers the opportunity to save time and money. But when sales are not direct there are fewer opportunities to ask questions and make sure that we are really happy with what we buy. European legislation on distance marketing of financial services is intended to protect us by:

- prohibition of unfair trading practices which require consumers to buy an unsolicited service;
- restriction of other practices such as unsolicited phone calls and electronic messages ('coldcalling' and 'spamming');
- compelling financial service companies to provide consumers with all necessary information before closing a contract, including details of supplier, price and payment arrangements, contractual rights and obligations, performance of services;
- in terms of consumer, entitlement to withdraw from the contract within a certain period of thought, normally 14 days but up to 30 days for life insurance and individual pensions.

European Community gives us the possibility to purchase goods and services anywhere we want at low prices without concern for customs, taxes or, in the Euro area, exchange rates.

The number of people shopping abroad and on the Internet is constantly growing. We seek the protection of our rights as a consumer, regardless of the place where we decide to buy.

Revealing mechanisms for manipulation can improve customer discernment and can boost preventive or corrective action against unfair commercial practices.

EU tries to protect its citizens. Protection of their health and well-being means of what they want to become: United European Nation, where laws governing the welfare of fellow being are to be elevated to the high level of importance. In Union, the consumer acts on the basis of principles or micro laws governing health and quality of life. Analyzing European Union recommendations on consumer protection, there is an underlying guideline pursuing a healthy life. (Figure no. 8) This guide actually provides a chance to life of future generations. Out of these guidelines we have gleaned some defining principles:

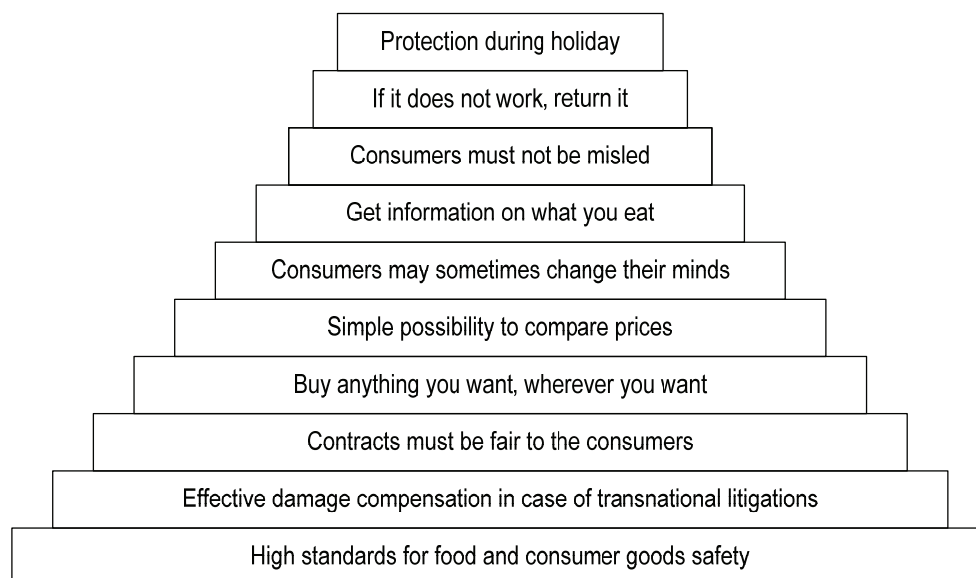


Figure no. 8: Basic principles of consumers in the European Union

Source: proposal author

Conclusions

Success and living a healthy life lies in the quality of products purchased. Many of us are under reflex but the idea of buying in handling various spots suggestive of buying products they do not need. Purchase is not only unhealthy but also some products on the market create an emotional dependency. People generally do not know what to buy and therefore allow more or less influenced by others. As well as each of us can decide on what to buy and try first of all we as consumers to protect our quality of uncertainties of what we offer in the market. If we decide to buy quality and not quantity then manufacturers will try to give us the respect we seek by providing superior quality products. And those who repeatedly brings us messages of "perpetual buying 'do nothing but to create in us a reflection of refusing the idea of buying bad products, products that threaten our lives.

At present, consumers are respected, even if not entirely, but at least they have an idea of whatever they buy, they are given the possibility of a choice and they can trust a similar protection of other consumers in the European Union. They are those who may require punishment of traders who break the law.

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